

United States Naval War College

Newport, Rhode Island

Fleet Seminar Program

NSDM

Piracy in the Straits of Malacca

By

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8 May 2011

This essay is submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements for NSDM. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of Defense.

Report Documentation Page			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188		
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 08 MAY 2011	2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2011 to 00-00-2011		
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Piracy In The Straits Of Malacca-US Policy Choices			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
			5b. GRANT NUMBER		
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S)			5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
			5e. TASK NUMBER		
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) United States Naval War College,Fleet Seminar Program,Newport,RI,02841			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT Piracy has long been an international security problem that nations have dealt with to ensure maritime commerce, trade, and other commercial interest continues uncontested. In the last twenty years, one region of the world ? the Straits of Malacca (SOM) ? has been an area where traditional fishermen and unemployed seafarers have turn to piracy to support their families and attain a better way of life. However, with nearly 70,000 vessels transiting the SOM yearly, ensuring a safe and uninterrupted passage, are critical for the economies of the US and our Asian partners. The author suggest that to ensure the security of the United States, USPACOM must continue to be vigilant in the Straits of Malacca by helping regional countries develop a multi-layered offensive strategy, including, the development of an anti-piracy national, bi-lateral, and multi-lateral offensive military responses; facilitating of a common information picture in countries bordering the SOM; and assisting countries bordering the SOM provide economic alternatives to its unemployed citizens.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 9	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

Piracy has long been an international security problem that nations have dealt with to ensure maritime commerce, trade, and other commercial interest continues uncontested. In the last twenty years, one region of the world – the Straits of Malacca (SOM) – has been an area where traditional fishermen and unemployed seafarers have turn to piracy to support their families and attain a better way of life. However, with nearly 70,000 vessels¹ transiting the SOM yearly, ensuring a safe and uninterrupted passage, are critical for the economies of the US and our Asian partners. Studies sponsored by the Japanese and Singapore governments estimate that by 2020, 141,000 vessels will use the SOM to move cargo between leading industrialized nations.² However, according to the International Maritime Piracy Reporting Centre, piracy has declined in the SOM for the last two years. The investments in resources by Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore have resulted in a safer maritime route. That being said, piracy has a tendency to resurge if resources are withdrawn and economies decline. Thus, to ensure the security of the United States, USPACOM must continue to be vigilant in the Straits of Malacca by helping regional countries develop a multi-layered offensive strategy, including, the development of an anti-piracy national, bi-lateral, and multi-lateral offensive military responses; facilitating of a common information picture (CIP) in countries bordering the SOM; and assisting countries bordering the SOM provide economic alternatives to its unemployed citizens.

Policy Choices for PACOM

National, Bi-lateral, and Multi-lateral Offensive Considerations

USPACOM must continue to encourage nations that border the SOM to continue their unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral naval and air patrols, but also to invest in modern ISR technology. The SOM is a relatively small area to patrol with naval vessels and since 2004, the

governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore (GoIMS) have conducted joint maritime and air patrols to deter and defeat piracy.³ Besides these patrols, these nations have developed

communications links to their respective naval headquarters, established a ship-rider program, and taken steps to identify areas where piracy takes place. These operations have resulted in a decrease in attacks since 2006. Figure 1 provides an

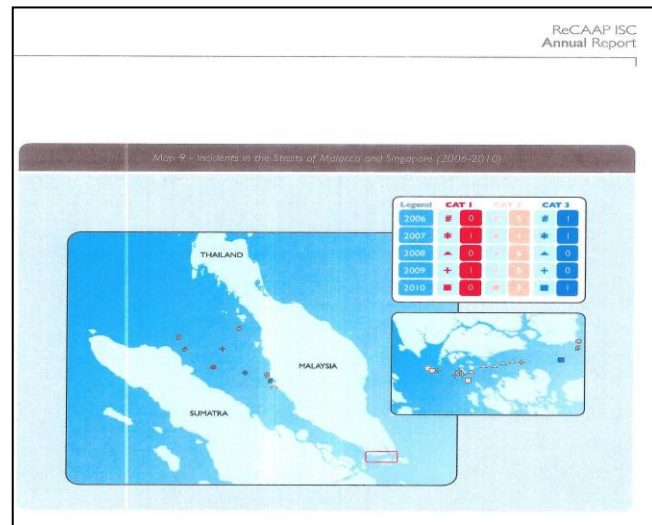


Figure 1: Attacks in the Strait of Malacca

indication of the effectiveness of these

multilateral efforts.⁴ However, these countries have relied on piloted aircraft, which limits time on station (TOS) due to manpower and maintenance constraints. Studies have shown that using unmanned aircraft or UAV allows for extended patrols of ungoverned space, in addition, to cutting down on mechanical problems.

Indonesia, with US help, should be developing their organic UAV fleet. By strategically placing UAV systems at Indonesian air bases (Figure 2), greater TOS could be achieved. These UAVs could be used in a split-operations

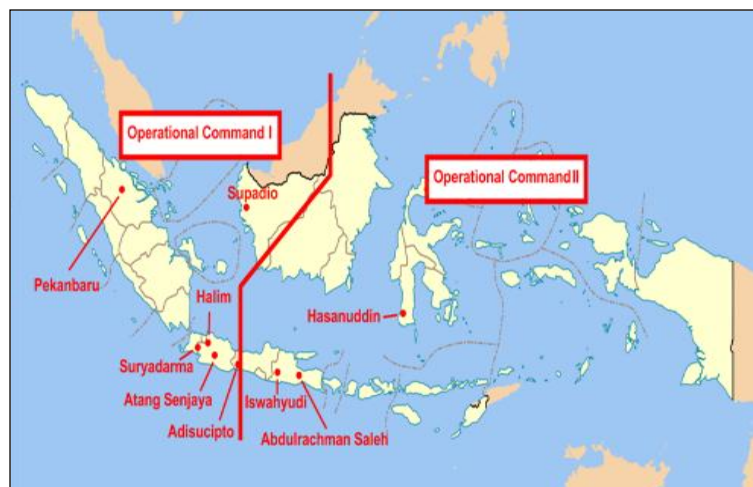


Figure 2: Locations of Indonesia Airbases

manner at Operational Commands I

& II to ensure coverage of the area of operation. To ensure operations are effective, all three

countries must operate a common intelligence picture so they are able to react to impending threats. Thus, the next recommendation is development of a common information picture to ensure information sharing.

Facilitating a Common Information Picture (Information Sharing)

Developing an information sharing backbone to achieve information dominance (ID) has been a key tenet of the US Chief of Naval Operations for years⁵, and investing in a first rate ID system would improve command and control of military platforms belonging to the GoIMS. The current Information Centre located in Singapore is only a repository for historical data, where analysts conduct trend analysis. Establishing an operations center where ISR, naval, and air operations can be planned, current data can be collected, and new missions be tasked would improve responsiveness of these individual platforms. Rather than working separately, synergy can be achieved by combining and multi-echeloning military platforms over the SOM. The US military has the skills and technology to conduct effective intelligence collection and application of timely operational responses. However, in the short term, USPACOM can assist in the SOM by deploying Tactical UAVs, such as the Fire Scout⁶ and other leading UAVs currently being developed for use in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In addition to developing a common information sharing platform with accesses and safeguards, USPACOM can help sponsor information sharing working groups, stand-up a permanent information sharing task force, and work with partner nations and industry to ensure that information sharing continues as technology improves. Developing temporary patches for information sharing problems doesn't usually solve a problem until personnel are assigned to task forces responsible for information sharing. USPACOM should use the US Secretary of

Defense's ISR Task Force or JIEDDO as templates for dedicating personnel to solve a recurring problem.⁷ In addition, this task force would take the lead in working with information sharing commercial vendors, national-level technology centers, and leading-edge technology innovators.⁸

Providing Economic Alternatives

One of the main issues with the increase of piracy across the world, especially in the SOM is the lack of employment for young working age males, so developing economic solutions on the land is a policy issue that PACOM must advocate with regional countries. According to the Roderick Chia, the coastal communities along the SOM have felt the negative downturn of Asian market crisis, weak state

development, marginalization of maritime communities, and official corruption⁹. These human security issues have impacted the coastal communities, forcing fisherman to resort to piracy. Some lines of operations or economic alternatives

that USPACOM can advocate are the following:

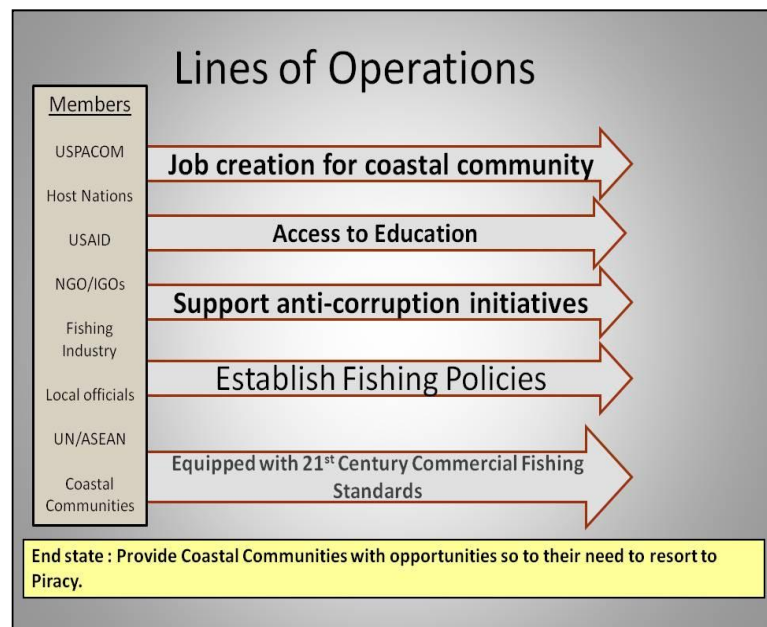


Figure 3: PACOM Lines of Operations

- *Job creation for coastal community:* USPACOM can work with host nations and partner nations to provide young males with jobs so they have an income to feed their families and improve their sense of worth. Giving these communities a

positive outlook on how host nation governments care about their welfare can help stop piracy.

- *Access to education:* USPACOM can work with USAID and host nations to fund the building of schools, recruitment of caring teachers, access to vocational and post-secondary education, and assistance in post-education employment. Studies have shown that a better educated population will rely less on illegal activities.
- *Support anti-corruption initiatives:* USPACOM can work with partner nations to identify corruption at the local level and replace them with well-paid officials. These replacement officials need to be educated and monitored to ensure they also don't follow their corrupt counterparts.
- *Establish Fishing Policies:* USPACOM can work with partner nations to ensure there is no illegal fishing by foreign vessels, t fishing limits are enforced, and native fisherman are given priority in fishing areas. Protecting the income of native fisherman can also aid in decreasing economic inequality among coastal communities.
- *Equipping with 21st Century Fishing Standards:* One of the major problems with coastal community fishing is their inability to maximize their time out on the ocean. USAID can seek the support of fishing experts who understand how to make fishing profitable for coastal communities. Rather than using rudimentary technology for harvesting, processing, and shipping fish, coastal communities need assistance in developing their own 21st century fishing processing procedures.

Conclusion

USPACOM's area of responsibility exceeds all the other Combatant Commands, and while PACOM is not currently engaged in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the issues they face are many. One of the issues that has received less attention but is still a critical and explosive issue is piracy. The SOM has historically been an area where coastal communities have turned to piracy to supplement their income during times of economic downturns. However, in the last five years, piracy has decreased in the SOM as a result of increased collaboration between regional countries bordering the SOM.

As piracy is an issue that concerns leading shipping companies and is critical to US economic security, USPACOM must be ready to tackle piracy should it reemerge in the SOM. But why wait? USPACOM should engage and encourage regional nations to improve their surveillance of the SOM with the latest ISR and military platforms, invest in developing information sharing technologies and protocols, and develop economic solutions for the indigenous coastal communities. Improving all three areas will help to ensure the safety of shipping vessels that transit the SOM for years to come.

Recommendations for Policy Implementation and Further Research

USPACOM should immediately establish a SOM initiatives team (SIT) that brings experts from the US government and international community to dissect the policy, funding, oversight, and legal issues associated with these recommendations. Further, it would allow the Commander, USPACOM to understand the views of senior DOD and congressional leaders, regional country leaders, and the rest of the SOM communities of interest.

¹ Joshua Ho, "Piracy In the Gulf of Aden: Lessons From The Malacca Strait," *Online S. Rajaratham School of International Studies*, (January 22, 2009), <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/Perspective/RSIS0092009.pdf> (Assessed April 1, 2011).

² Joshua Ho, "The Straits of Malacca and Singapore: Ensuring Safe and Efficient Shipping," *Online S. Rajaratham School of International Studies* (December, 3, 2009), <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/Perspective/RSIS1192009.pdf> (Assessed April 12, 2011).

³ Roderick Chia, Pau Khan Khup Hangzo, and Kevin Punzalan, " Maritime Predations in the Malacca Straits: Treading New Waters," *Online S. Rajaratham School of International Studies*, (August 1, 2009), <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/nts/resources/nts-insight/NTS%20Insight%20Sept%202009.pdf> (Assessed April 12, 2011).

⁴ ReCAP Information Centre, *2010 Annual Report*, <http://www.recaap.org/AlertsReports/IncidentReports.aspx?EntryId=19>, (Assessed April 22, 2011).

⁵ Admiral G. Roughead, US Navy, Chief of Naval Operations, *Executing the Maritime Strategy 2011*, (October 2010), <http://www.navy.mil/features/CNOG%202011.pdf> (Assessed April 22, 2011).

⁶ Ibid, CNO, p.2. In this strategy, the CNO states that the US Navy must be the forefront of deploying vertical tactical UAVs to areas of the world that need this capability. Using the Fire-Scout in the SOM can prove beneficial for anti-piracy operations.

⁷ JIEDDO, DODD 2000.19E https://www.jieddo.dod.mil/content/docs/20060214_DoD_Directive_JIEDDO.pdf (Assessed April 22, 2011).

⁸ Ibid, JIEDDO and the ISR Task Force have a streamlined acquisition process that promotes private industry to develop solutions to COCOM gaps. Using this rapid fielding process, both organizations can field technology to COCOMs within 12-15 months.

⁹ Ibid, Chia, p. 4.